S/P - Mr. L. Berry

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FORMER ITALIAN COLONIES

U.S. - UK Discussions Regarding the Former Italian Colonies, and particularly British Plans for a Treaty with Cyrenaica.

The attached papers summarizing discussions between UK and U.S. representatives resulted from a conversation on this subject between Secretary Acheson and Foreign Minister Bevin held in Paris on November 11, 1949.

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Attachments:

1. Summary of Conversation between Mr. George McGhee, US and Mr. Michael Wright, UK, November 15, 1949.

2. Memorandum of Conversation between Mr. Michael Wright, UK, and Mr. Adrian Fisher, US, November 18, 1949.

3. Memorandum of Conversation between Mr. Michael Wright, UK, and Mr. James S. Keese, Jr., US, November 18, 1949.

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November 15, 1949

DISCUSSION ON THE FORMER ITALIAN COLONIES

1. Mr. Moose opened the discussion by saying that he had heard a suggestion to the effect that the United Kingdom Delegation to the United Nations was considering moving, in a plenary session, an amendment to the First Committee's Resolution on the Former Italian Colonies in so far as it affected the Commissioner and the Advisory Council. He understood that the United Kingdom Delegation was thinking of trying to get the resolution amended in a plenary session to provide for the earliest possible turn-over to the Italians of the administration of Italian Somaliland. While the United States was in full sympathy with the British aims in these respects, they saw some danger in re-opening these issues in a plenary session. Although the Resolution had been carried in the Committee by 49 votes in favour to one against, with eight abstentions, it would be a pity to endanger its passage through the plenary.

2. Mr. Wright began his remarks by saying that only the administering power could appreciate the difficulties of trying to run a territory satisfactorily from the point of view of its inhabitants, to safeguard long-term British interests, and to keep in step with the U.N. If the United Kingdom had at times seemed hard to please, it should be remembered that they alone had all these difficulties to contend with.

ITALIAN SOMALILAND

3. Mr. Wright said that the United Kingdom had never been really happy that an Italian return to Somaliland was the right policy from the point of view of the future of the territory but the United Kingdom had agreed to support an Italian return as the lesser of several evils. The major danger attaching to it was that the Italians might run into serious trouble when they got back to the territory. Whether they did or not would depend largely on their behavior when they returned and on the kind of officials they took with them. The United Kingdom was anxious not to see any trouble develop, particularly before British troops had withdrawn. From the British point of view, therefore, the sooner the Italians took over, the better it would be. Details of the hand-over had already been planned under the title "Operation Caesar", as suggested by the Italians. It was expected that the hand-over would take two months from the commencement of the operation. The British authorities would do everything possible to help the Italians before and during the hand-over but they would leave no one behind after the hand-over period. The United Kingdom would like the hand-over to take place in February or March at the latest, so that it could be completed before the monsoon season. The United Kingdom would therefore be very grateful for the assistance

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of the United States Government in getting a trusteeship agreement for Italian Somaliland approved as soon as possible. In response to an American question, Mr. Wright indicated that the paragraph in the Committee resolution for the transfer of administration to the Italians was satisfactory.

4. Mr. McGhee asked whether Mr. Wright thought the United Nations Council would work satisfactorily. Mr. Wright replied that, in his opinion, it would be extremely difficult to make the United Nations scheme work satisfactorily. The United Kingdom would never have agreed to administer a territory under such terms, but as the Italians had agreed to it, it would be their problem. It was asked on the United States side whether the Italians had a draft trusteeship agreement ready since it was felt that this would save a good deal of time. Mr. Wright said that he was not certain whether a draft agreement had yet been worked out by the Italians.

ERITREA

5. Mr. Moose mentioned that the Commission to be sent by the United Nations to investigate the situation in Eritrea was composed, as at present, of representatives of Pakistan, Norway, Burma, Guatemala and South Africa. Mr. Wright said that there seemed nothing to be done but to wait and see how the Commission did its work. If the Commission was objective, it would probably have to recommend something more or less similar to the U.S.-U.K. proposals. Mr. Wright mentioned that he had heard a rumour that the United States Delegation was considering re-introducing its proposal for the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia. The United Kingdom would at this stage prefer to let the present proposal for a Commission go through. Mr. McGhee said that since the United Kingdom would have to bear the burden of another year's administration of Eritrea under the proposal for a Commission, it was for the United Kingdom to say whether they preferred to bear that burden rather than try to get a solution involving personal union under the Emperor. Mr. McGhee agreed to find out what the United States Delegation had in mind.

LIBYA

6. Mr. McGhee asked what the United Kingdom intended to do regarding the possibility of amending the First Committee's Resolution. Mr. Wright replied that the United Kingdom Delegation had at present merely reserved the right to raise the matter in a plenary session. Meanwhile the matter had been referred to London. He felt personally that the United Kingdom Delegation was unlikely to move any further amendments.

7. Mr. McGhee

7. Mr. McGhee asked what objections the United Kingdom had to the Committee's proposal for a U.N. Commissioner and a Council. Mr. Wright replied that the only workable principle was that one authority alone should be responsible for the administration of a territory. He understood that the United Nations had now decided to omit the word "advisory" which had previously been used to qualify the Council. Mr. McGhee pointed out that the Resolution provided that the Council would "aid and advise" the Commissioner. But he agreed that some of the functions laid down for the Council dealt with matters such as the setting up of a constitution which closely affected the administration of the territory.

8. The problem of where the Council would sit was also discussed. Mr. Wright said that this point had not been made clear in the resolution; but if the Council were to sit in the territory itself, immense difficulties would arise. A Council of ten people sitting, for example, in so small a place as Tripoli would be quite out of balance, even if the Council were harmonious. But in fact the Council was unlikely to be harmonious, since so many different national interests and aims would be in play. Mr. Moose recalled that the U.S. favored having the headquarters of the Council outside of the territory. He added that Geneva had a good deal to commend it for the seat of the Council. If the Council resided in the territory itself, they would have constant appeals from the local inhabitants to intervene in the administration. Mr. Wright said that the British authorities had been told both by Tripolitanian notables and by the Emir of Cyrenaica that they did not want a United Nations commission. With regard to the Commissioner, it was agreed that the personality would be of great importance. Dr. Bunche and Dr. Padilla Nervo had been mentioned.

9. Mr. Wright then recalled that the Interim Committee was to consider the procedure for the delimitation of frontiers. There were three main problems:-

(a) The frontier between Cyrenaica and Egypt where the Egyptians wanted and the Emir seemed disposed to concede some rectification near the Sollum Plateau.

(b) The frontier between Cyrenaica and Tripolitania where the Emir wanted some minor rectification in his favour.

(c) The frontier between Italian Somaliland and Ethiopia which presented by far the most serious problem. The Ethiopians were aggrieved at the behaviour of the United Nations in respect of Eritrea and Italian Somaliland and were angry with the Italians because of the means they had employed to arouse a movement in Eritrea in favour of independence. The undelimited frontier between Italian Somaliland and Ethiopia would provide endless opportunity for the Ethiopians to make trouble if they wished.

10. Mr. Wright

10. Mr. Wright then raised the question of future developments in Libya. This was the most important outstanding question. If the United Nations Resolution was passed, the United Kingdom would like, within a fairly short time, to see Cyrenaica fully independent and to sign a Treaty with her. The Emir had long been asking the British Government to do precisely that, especially because he was afraid of an Italian return and of Egyptian intentions. Mr. Wright asked whether the United States Government were satisfied that if the United Nations Resolution as it stood at present were passed by the General Assembly, that the United Kingdom would be able to go ahead in this way. Mr. McGhee replied in the affirmative but said that it depended on the method which was adopted.

11. Mr. Wright said that one of the British difficulties was that it was not possible to make a Treaty valid in international law with a country which was not independent. It was therefore impossible for the United Kingdom to sign a Treaty with Cyrenaica until the territory had been made independent. The Foreign Office were considering three alternative methods on which they would welcome the views of the United States Government. These alternatives were:

(a) The United Kingdom, as administering power, would declare Cyrenaica to be independent.

(b) The Emir would himself declare Cyrenaica to be independent and the British Government would recognize that independence.

(c) The United Kingdom would conclude a Treaty with Cyrenaica which would contain both an alliance and a declaration of independence.

12. Mr. Moose asked whether it would not be possible to make a Treaty dealing with defence alone and avoiding the subject of independence. Mr. Wright said that this would not be possible for two reasons:-

(a) The Emir would not sign a Treaty unless it gave him independence, and

(b) The Treaty would not be valid if Cyrenaica were not independent at the time when it was signed.

13. In reply to a question, Mr. Wright said that the United Kingdom wanted a long-term Treaty of, say, twenty years' duration, perhaps on the lines of the Treaties with Iraq and Jordan. It was also asked on the American side what would happen to the Treaty when the union of Libya came about. Mr. Wright replied that this was one of the questions which had caused the British uneasiness about the

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wording of the Resolution. It might be necessary to revise the Treaty or renegotiate it with a central Libyan government in respect of Cyrenaica. The British government had decided that it was unwilling to make a Treaty which would commit them to the defence of all of Libya. Mr. McGhee said that there was agreement on the objective which the United Kingdom had in mind and the United States must accept the British decision regarding the size of the territory of which it was prepared to undertake the defence. It would be desirable to discuss in future meetings what could be done to further this objective. Mr. Wright said that if the United Nations Assembly wanted to withdraw Cyrenaican independence once it had been granted by the administering power, the Assembly would find itself engaged in an unpleasant task.

14. Mr. Wright then said that the United Kingdom planned to begin setting up a Tripolitanian administration and to start turning over powers to it in a manner similar to what had been done in Cyrenaica. He understood that the United States had defence interests in Tripolitania and it would be helpful to the British authorities in trying to further these interests if they could be informed of the United States desires in this regard. As long as the United Kingdom remained the administering power in Tripolitania everything would be done to safeguard United States interests. But the question remained as to what would happen once independence was achieved? Did the United States Government intend to conclude a Treaty with the authorities that would become responsible for Tripolitania? Events might move quickly and it would not be safe to assume that independence would not come until 1952. Mr. McGhee replied that the United States did wish to maintain its base rights in Tripolitania, but he promised to check with the United States military authorities what their requirements were. Mr. Wright said that it might be possible for the British authorities to give a helping hand as events moved along and that they would be anxious to do so. But this would depend on their knowing what U.S. requirements were in the area. Mr. McGhee expressed appreciation and said that the United States member of the U.N. Council for Libya might also be able to keep an eye on the United States interests.

15. It was pointed out on the United States side that there was no tribal system to build on in Tripolitania as there had been in Cyrenaica. It was thought that Boshir Bey Saadawi was satisfied with the present United Nations resolution and might form one of a group of notables who would be willing to cooperate in setting up an administration.

16. The discussion then turned to the Fezzan. Mr. Moose said that the Fezzan had always been regarded by the United States as a dependency of Tripolitania. Independence for the Fezzan alone was not feasible. Mr. Wright said that the problem of the Fezzan was

particularly

particularly difficult because of the French attitude. The French had always been opposed to progress in Tripolitania. Otherwise the United Kingdom would have probably pressed faster with constitutional development in that territory. The French were also suspicious of the Senussi and worried about the future of their own North African territories.

17. Mr. Moose said that the present United Nations Resolution would seem to preclude the French from taking over the Fezzan. Mr. McGhee added that the United States was interested in the stability of French North Africa for strategic reasons but was not too happy about French policy there. In fact, the United States had urged the French to allow the local population a greater share in the government of those areas. He wondered whether it would be possible for the United States and the United Kingdom to keep up a gentle pressure on the French with regard to their North African possessions. Sir Derick Hoyer Millar pointed out that the French were very touchy about this matter and that it was very difficult to give them advice in such a way that they would not resent it. Mr. Wright said that the United Kingdom was not at present prepared to approach the French in this matter. Experience showed that this was only likely to do more harm than good.

British Embassy - D. C. Tebbit
NFA:AWS:AEMellons:hvm
November 19, 1949

Approved by:
Mr. Michael Wright (U.K. Foreign Office)
Mr. George McGhee (Asst. Sec., NEA)
November 20, 1949